

Upper Tenmile Creek Mining Area

Near Helena, Montana, Lewis and Clark County
Congressional District - At Large
EPA ID# MTD SFN7578012

ABOUT THE UPPER TEN MILE CREEK MINING AREA SITE . . .

The Upper Ten mile Creek Mining Area site is located in the Rimini Mining District, southwest of Helena, Montana, and consists of numerous abandoned and inactive hard rock mine sites that produced gold, lead, zinc, and copper. EPA added the Upper Ten mile Creek Mining Area to the Superfund National Priorities List on October 22, 1999, due to mining-waste problems in the watershed.

Superfund mine-waste removals occurred beginning in 1999 field seasons continuing through 2001. Removal activities are limited in scope and cost by statute. NPL listing was supported by the local community in part because it allows access to the resources necessary to fully address the magnitude of mine wastes and discharges of contaminated water found in the watershed. EPA is quickly cleaning up the high priority areas (Red Mountain, Bunker Hill, Susie Peerless/Jenney/King and part of the Upper Valley Forge Mine sites) and will address 70 remaining mine sites.

To date, EPA has been unable to identify a potentially responsible party so the cleanup is being paid for with federal funds. Cooperating agencies have combined resources to expedite a watershed cleanup. The U.S. Forest Service has taken the lead role in cleaning up wastes on its property within the Superfund site boundary (Upper Valley Forge, Beatrice, Justice and Armstrong Mines). Where individual mines involve both Federal and private lands, cleanup expenses are shared by EPA and the Forest Service. EPA and the Forest Service also share construction and maintenance costs of joint mine waste repository. Throughout the cleanup, EPA will work closely with the Forest Service, State and local community.

BACKGROUND

Mining began in the Rimini Mining District before 1870 and continued through the 1920s. Little mining has been performed in the Rimini Mining District since the early 1930s. The site boundary includes the drainage basin of Ten mile Creek upstream of the Helena Water Treatment Plant and includes tributaries that supply water to the plant's five intake pipelines. EPA identified 150 individual mine sites within the watershed boundary, of which 70 have been prioritized for clean-up. Many of these mine features are above the five City of Helena drinking water intakes which supply over 70 percent of the city's water.

The watershed has many stake holders, including landowners, local communities, local and state government, special interest groups, and several federal agencies, including EPA. Collaboration among the stake holders is necessary to achieve a cleanup that will be expedient, efficient and long-lasting. EPA is committed to finding the necessary resources for response actions and addressing stakeholders' interests in the cleanup process.

EPA is coordinating with other state and federal agencies by addressing Clean Water Act problems related to mining wastes in the watershed that have been identified by the State. Tenmile Creek is the State's top priority for a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) allocation. EPA and the Forest Service are developing a Superfund cleanup strategy and goals. EPA will keep stakeholders informed and make sure they have a voice in cleanup decisions. Following release of the proposed plan in the Fall of 2001, the record of decision is expected during the winter of 2002.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

Immediately following the release of the (ROD), EPA will initiate design activities so that the clean up activities will continue during the 2002 field season. In this way EPA was able to use its "Removal" program to initiate mine waste cleanup on high priority sites for the first three field seasons and will be maintaining cleanup continuity by following with more comprehensive cleanup of all remaining sites under the "Remedial" program.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

EPA will continue to inform affected communities and the appropriate agencies of EPA's progress and incorporate information received from these entities to arrive at the final remedy. Examples of significant issues that have been expressed to EPA that are under current consideration include:

- Minimizing the operation costs for a potable water system for the Rimini Community;
- Minimizing operation and maintenance costs that the State will need to assume; and
- Provision of a secure repository for wastes removed from the watershed.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRESS

EPA conducted removals in summer 1999 and 2000 that removed over 40,000 cubic yards of waste from the Bunker Hill/Ten mile, Red Mountain, and Suzie mines in the Ten Mile watershed and the Buckeye/Enterprise mines in the adjoining Basin Creek watershed. Removal activities in the Upper Ten Mile Creek watershed continued through the 2001 field season. USFS will take the lead in cleaning up the Upper Valley Forge mine and will be compensated by EPA for portions of private property that are addressed at this site. Wastes from both agencies will continue to be disposed of in the joint Luttrell Repository that has been engineered to address agency and local community concerns. Following the Record of Decision in the summer of 2001, EPA designed subsequent cleanups to be performed by the Agency's Remedial Program during the 2002 field season until completion.